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RE: Montana Senate Bill 101

Dear Sirs and Madams:

The Permit to Hunt From a Vehicle (PTHFV) was introduced by Montana FWP to facilitate hunting by individuals with significant mobility impairments. As the title suggests, it does enable its holders to shoot from a vehicle as may be necessary due to their mobility limits. Over time land management agencies such as the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management created designated disability roads for access and deferred to the PTHFV to determine eligibility. Likewise, some private landowners provide privileged hunting access to holders of the PTHFV.

Prior to 2001, the eligibility criteria for PTHFV were objective. The 2001 legislature passed a bill to change those eligibility criteria, which inadvertently made it hard for physicians to actually measure and difficult for FWP to determine eligibility. This change resulted in overuse of the permit and qualification by hunters for whom it wasn't really intended and who don't really need it. Since 2001 applicants in poor physical condition have been able to qualify for the same PTHFV incentives as someone without function of their arms and legs due to permanent disability. Once qualified, the holder remains permanently eligible unless the statute changes.

Since the 2001 eligibility criteria change, the number of Montanans eligible for a PTHFV has increased roughly 500% to approximately 10,000 people who hold the permit. This huge increase has resulted in the opposite effect of the permit's original intent. Because only a limited number of hunters per day can access designated PTHFV driving areas, PTHFV holders with significant mobility impairments have a difficult time getting that increased access. Secondly, some private landowners inclined to create disability access agreements with FWP's Block Management have decided not to when they have realized that some 10,000 Montanans would be eligible. Finally, the public opinion of the PTHFV and those who hold it has become negative because so many people see it as too easy to get and as being abused by those who don't need it.

SB 101 is a measure to return the PTHFV to its original intent in order to benefit hunters with significant mobility impairments. This bill makes eligibility criteria objective and easy for eligible medical professionals to measure and certify, FWP to provide, and Enforcement officials to enforce. It is also a measure of proper conservation and wildlife stewardship by disallowing uneven leverage over game animals by Montana hunters.

As a lifetime sportsman, a disabled hunter since 1991, and with concern about Montana's conservation and wildlife, I ask you to pass SB 101 to restore respect and purpose to the PTHFV.

Thank you,

Christopher E. Clasby